

# How proportion of public housing affects wellbeing

Chisholm, E., Robertson, O., Howden-Chapman, P., & Pierse, N. (2022). Does the proportion of public housing tenants in a community affect their wellbeing? Results from New Zealand: A retrospective cohort study using linked administrative data. *Cities*, 131(103916), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103916>

## RANGAHAU / RESEARCH

- The belief that tenure or socio-economic mix leads to societal and individual benefits has a long history in Aotearoa New Zealand. Early colonialists proposed that a mix of settlers would increase community efficiency; the post-war suburbs of Otago and Porirua were planned to be limited to one-third public housing, and since the 1970s, governments have focussed on building small clusters of public housing among private housing.
- More recently, it has been argued that for the wellbeing of the tenants, the amount of public housing in an area should be limited to 20-30%.
- To investigate whether the evidence support this belief, we drew on de-identified linked government administrative data to explore how the proportion of public housing in different sized the areas where people lived related to their health outcomes five years later.

## NGĀ HUA MATUA / KEY FINDINGS

- Very few public housing tenants live in areas that predominantly housed other public housing tenants.
- We found that as the proportion of public housing tenants in the population increases, the hospitalisation rate generally decreases slightly, with our model results implying there is a minimum at 49%.
- Those living in areas with less than 15% public housing tenants have 20% more hospitalisations on average than those living in areas with 15% to 70% public housing tenants.
- While statistically significant, the effect size is modest, with our model predicting that those living in meshblocks with 49% public housing tenants would have on average 0.05 fewer hospitalisations than those living in meshblocks with 10% public housing tenants.
- We conducted the same analysis at the Census Area Unit level and found broadly the same pattern. We found similar results for mental health outpatient visits and pharmaceutical dispensing.
- Living in a community where more public housing tenants were resident had a minor, but positive impact on health outcomes for public housing tenants.

## WHAIKUPU / RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Housing providers:** Plan for larger proportions of public housing in streets and neighbourhoods. This would benefit public housing tenants and result in more public housing overall, in a time where public housing is in great demand.
- **Local government:** Design guidelines and design panels should encourage greater proportions of public housing in mixed tenure communities.
- **Central government:** Ensure the public and community housing providers and developers are aware of the benefits of higher proportions of public housing.

